



George Iwamoto



A generational story through family heirlooms

George Iwamoto was just beginning grade school when he was uprooted from his home in Los Angeles, and sent to live in Manzanar with his family during WWII. Today, he retains clear memories from his camp experience, many of which center around the artifacts he's kept for all these years. To

our meeting in Little Tokyo he brought family heirlooms just as valuable and precious as something you'd find in the Japanese American National Museum down the street: A one-of-a-kind watercolor painting featuring him and a friend; a toy "tank" constructed with soap and a spool; and a handmade wooden chair crafted by a block neighbor. Now at 79 years old, George remains active in the Nikkei community, well-known and respect by many, and serves as a wealth of knowledge on the Japanese American WWII experience.

Along with precious family artifacts, he shared a few recollections.



George and his friend, Ko Nishimura, were painted into this everyday scene of Manzanar by renowned artist and watercolorist, [Kango Takamura](#).



“The artist gave the painting to my Dad,” says George. “It’s always been in the family. He was an illustrator for a magazine before. UCLA has 77 of his paintings.” George and Ko are depicted as children on the lefthand side.

On camp memories:

“There was this one American Indian guy who did a Native dance, and when he left he said something like, ‘Don’t tell anybody my name. Don’t tell anyone I did this.’ He kind of acted like he didn’t want to be there. I’m sure he was paid to put on a show.”

Their choices of clothes and provisions from the outside world was severely limited, due to the rampant prejudice. “You could order from the Sears and Roebuck catalogs. The other ones wouldn’t take your order.”

“My dad used to fish. But we didn’t have any equipment so he caught fish with his hands. He would walk along the stream and he would stick his hand in. First it was trial and error. He would grab them and they’d swim away but he found out if you cradled them and gently took them out of the water, they wouldn’t move.”



George's "tank," creatively made out of a wooden spool and piece of soap. "We used to have races with it. Or play war."

On receiving his redress, George expressed that the money didn't mean much to him, for he was just a child and relatively shielded from the atrocities at hand. The people most deserving people of the apology, like his parents, had already passed.



Three generations: George, his daughter Alyson Iwamoto, and her daughter, Aiko